UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA

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# THE FREEMAN'S MORALS

## A CRITIQUE OF THE PHILOSOPHY OF REMY DE GOURMONT

WILLIAM REX CRAWFORD

A THESIS

IN PHILOSOPHY

PRESENTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL IN
PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR
THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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# FOREWORD

While it has not been the intention of the author to present a comprehensive survey of the life and works of Remy de Gourmont, it may perhaps be of service to some to find here a brief restatement of a few essential facts.

Gourmont came of an old Norman family, and counted among his ancestors that Gilles de Gourmont who was the first to print a Greek book in France. Gourmont was born in a château at Bazoches-en-Houlme in 1858. His career as a student was passed in the province and it was not until he was twenty-five years of age that he removed to Paris, where he was thenceforward to make his home. A position at the Bibliothèque Nationale gave him an opportunity to lay the foundations for a remarkable erudition. An unfortunate article, Le Joujou-Patriotisme, was interpreted as unpatriotic, and cost him this position a few years later.

Alluring though the subject is, we cannot attempt an appraisal of the novels, poems and criticisms which Gourmont produced in the years following 1890, when his really characteristic and mature work begins with Sixtine, roman de la vie cérébrale. The curious will find in the bibliography by his brother Jean de Gourmont a reasonably adequate list of a literary production probably second in quantity only to that of one Frenchman, Voltaire. Its merit has been conceded by many. Havelock Ellis has called Gourmont the finest critic of our time, Papini, the most intelligent Frenchman of his day. Huneker labels him incomparable, and those who have compared him to his great contemporary, Anatole France, have pointed out the greater depth and originality of his judgments.[1]

Such opinions may justify, if justification is needed, an examination of those fundamental ideas about life and the conduct of life which form Gourmont's philosophy. It may throw some light on the rather fragmentary and unsystematic character of his philosophic writing if we remind our reader that our principal sources are compilations of the articles which he wrote daily or fortnightly for the *Mercure de France* and other

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[1] Lalou, R, Histoire de la littérature française contemporaine, Crès, Paris, 1924, pp. 293–294.

papers and periodicals. Little posthumous volumes (Pendant l'Orage, Dans la Tourmente, Pendant la Guerre) bring our record of this constant activity of Gourmont down to the very time of his death in September, 1915.

Some of his articles Gourmont rather arbitrarily grouped as Promenades Philosophiques and published in three volumes. Others, dealing for the most part, though not entirely, with literary topics, form the five volumes of Promenades Littéraires. Gourmont also turned his attention to current affairs, and between 1895 and 1912 contributed to the *Mercure de France* an extraordinarily successful running commentary on the events of the day. These were published in the five series of Epilogues and one supplementary volume; the fourth and fifth series, because they take the form of conversations between M. Delarue and M. Desmaisons, are also known, respectively, as Dialogues des Amateurs sur les Choses du Temps and Nouveaux Dialogues des Amateurs sur les Choses du Temps. The two important volumes, La Culture des Idées and Le Chemin de Velours: Nouvelles Dissociations d'Idées, are characteristically Gourmontian in method, but scarcely more systematic.

For the rest, what philosophy is to be found in Gourmont must be sought in a score of volumes, novels, fantasies, experiments in many forms of verse and prose; of these, the most notable are probably Une Nuit au Luxembourg and Les Chevaux de Diomède.

The translations used in quoting are the author's, except in two cases. Some quotations are from the selected essays translated by William Aspenwall Bradley under the title, Decadence and Other Essays in the Dissociation of Ideas. Arthur Ransome's translation of Une Nuit au Luxembourg has been used, the page numbers referring to the edition published by E. Haldeman–Julius in the Little Blue Book series.

To all this maze of writing Gourmont has himself supplied the guiding thread, as any candid examination will show. It is liberty and the love of liberty. The following essay indicates the relation of freedom to human knowing and doing, and what use Gourmont would have us make of our freedom, in a word, what shall be the Freeman's Morals.

W. R. C.

# THE FREEMAN'S MORALS

*A critique of the philosophy of Remy de Gourmont*

## I

### Truth and Liberty

To a discerning eye all that long martyrdom of man which we call history is likely to appear but the tale of the use of one man by another, of one group by another group. Whenever superiority of physical force, or the possession of the magic formula, or the experience of age has made it possible, human beings have looked upon others, not as persons, ends in themselves, but as ministrants to the greater glory or pleasure or the security and lazy comfort of their exploiters. And so, generally for economic purposes, children have been used by their elders and parents, women and wives by men, especially husbands, the pacific by military, the ill-situated by the well-situated, the ignorant by the knowing, the layman by the priest.

To History a thousand years are but as yesterday when it is past, and the brief span in which it has not been assumed that such exploitation was of the ineluctable nature of things is but a moment. But like the moment in which man added to his own powers those of greater giants than ever were "in those days" and made steam and electricity to do his will, it is a significant moment. During the years which have witnessed the Protestant Reformation, the revolutions of France and America, the rise of the Labor Movement and of Feminism, the growth of interest in Child Welfare, that Authority which once clothed the exploiter has been stripped from him. Authority is doomed. That self-assertion of the individual which is thought by many to characterize our age is its executioner.

However all-pervasive and permanent a thing the exploitation of which we have spoken may be, it is after all relatively palpable and gross. The more insidious foe to freedom is the authority which would fain persuade us, which, instead of coercing our wills, would relieve itself of that necessity by making our wills

in its own image, by imposing on us a morality from above, and constraining us the more effectively since we do not know that our thoughts and desires are constrained. The heart of the matter is the inexpugnable truth, the absolute morality that it teaches.

I. Remy de Gourmont did not know or appreciate some of the movements we have mentioned, and would have been ready to condemn their excesses, but in general that individualism which is the heart of the demand for freedom has had no more constant defender than he. Wherever freedom is menaced, there Gourmont takes his stand in defense of what to him is the supreme value, and no one has fought for freedom in more fields. It is true, but scarcely sufficient, to say that freedom was the dynamic idea in his ethics.[1] This, one of his few permanent enthusiasms, lies in the background of all of his work, a motivating and explanatory factor. It is of the essence of his scrupulous regard for individual freedom both in thought and action that he holds that even our best wisdom, our finest taste, should not be forced upon anyone. For him it seems useless to impose prudence on the world: it must be the outgrowth of conduct, even of playing with fire, if need be. Morality for him, then, is based on facts, not injunctions.[2] He feels that to force our aesthetic admirations on others is wicked. Once admit the principle of restriction of liberty, for such and other seeming-laudable purposes, and you open the door to limitations which destroy the only happiness we can know.

Francis de Miomandre, contrasting Gourmont with Voltaire, describes him thus: "Remy de Gourmont, on the contrary, passionately attached to liberty, scarcely attacks in earnest any but those who wish to restrict it, considering them unpardonable criminals; sensualist and amoralist, he sees for humanity only this world, he is unwilling that our happiness here should be put off or limited. All his fervor . . . is spent in showing that a little good will, with less folly and obstinacy, would suffice to assure

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[1] Parker, R. A., in Forum, 55:593.

[2] Cf. Holt, E. B., The Freudian Wish and its Significance for Ethics. Holt, N. Y., 1915.

for us, this happiness, relative to be sure, but the only one attainable: liberty in the conduct of one's life."[3]

II. The reasons for this characteristic attitude of the man are such as to make inevitable a brief incursion into his metaphysics. He felt, as we have hinted, that the arch-foe of freedom is the concept of the absolute,—absolute beauty, absolute good, absolute truth. We have bound ourselves, slaves to these creatures of our imagination. Now Gourmont has his doubts about the absolute; better, perhaps, he is certain that there is no absolute. The reason for this certainty lies in his adherence to subjective idealism. "The world is such as it appears to me. If it has a real existence in itself, it is inaccessible to me. It is that which I see it, or feel it to be."[4] To say that truth is conformity of the representation of an object with this object itself solves nothing; we know the object only as representation. The argument recurs, in answer to the frequently expressed opinion that "truth is a convenient word, composed (in French) of six letters, by which is expressed the accord between the object and the representation, that is to say, nothing which has a sense penetrable by a human intelligence, since we never know an object, whatever be its nature, except through the mental representation which we make ourselves of that object. The object does not exist in any more real sense in the representation. . . than a tree does in a photograph, and still, we must be content with the representation, for we shall never know the object, we shall never know whether there is an accord, and of what sort, between what is and what we know. Hence one can prove nothing."[5]

There is, nevertheless, in spite of the absence of proof, good reason for believing in an external reality, a reality corresponding to our representation. According to Gourmont this simple reason is that the senses correspond to the external realities, not vice versa. How do we come by our senses? "They have been created, not by the perceiving being, but by the perceptible

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[3] Francis de Miomandre, in Grande Revue, 1916, 23:1, p. 148.
[4] Decadence and other essays in the dissociation of ideas, translated by W. A. Bradley, p. 210.
[5] Epilogues, II, pp. 64–65.

environment. . . . The eye is the creation of light. . . . Since they are themselves the work of the principal general phenomena, the senses ought then to agree exactly—allowing for approximation—with the very nature which has created them."[6] We are forced, then, to admit the existence of a real world, for without it, our perceptive powers would never have been called into existence. However, even if the reality of the sensible world be admitted, we are obliged to pronounce cautiously upon the quality of this reality, as reality perceived and judged. We then return to idealism. . . . Matter existed before life. . . . The phenomena perceived by the senses are exterior to the senses that now perceive them; and this means that, if life becomes extinct, matter will survive life. . . . And yet what would a world be, that was neither thought nor felt? We must recognize that when we think of a world void of thought, it still contains our thought, or it is our thought which contains it and animates it. . . . This fact of materiality gives thought a secondary place. It is produced. It might not be. It is not primordial. It is a result, a consequence—doubtless a property of the nervous system, or even living matter. . . . But, if thought be a product, it is none the less productive in its turn. It does not create the world, it judges it. It does not destroy it, it modifies and reduces it to measure."[7] So the argument flows back and forth in his brain, finally to be summed up in the conclusion that material in its origin though it be, thought by its function leads us back to idealism. "The reasons of idealism plunge deep down into matter. Idealism means materialism, and conversely, materialism means idealism."[8]

Life, then, is from the standpoint of the liver, a series of sensations bound together by states of consciousness.[9] For Gourmont these sensations are the only fact, the only truth.[10] That the functions of the organism go hand in hand with its sensations, that we are as much doers of truth as hearers, seers,

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[6] Decadence, p. 226.
[7] *Op. cit.*, pp. 227–231.
[8] *Op. cit.*, p. 231.
[9] *Op. cit.*, p. 107.
[10] Epilogues, II, p. 65.

and touchers of it, all that Gourmont, like many another, neglects. The psychologist tells us that personality may be as well defined by the integration of behavior as by its receptivity to sensation; or rather, the total situation of the organism is accurately described only if we take into account the response to, as well as the reception of the sensation or stimulus. On the other hand is matter, the cause of these sensations, which in its reality is completely beyond our grasp. "All the theories of matter are equally hypothetical, the nature of matter is eternally unknown to us, since it falls under our senses only in infinitely varied appearances, the most lasting of which are still very precarious."[11] If he thinks of matter as a unitary force that, it must be admitted, is a postulate.[12]

As many, then, as are the sensibilities to take its impress, are the universes; and there is no Absolute there to think our universe for us, to bind it into one. "The world being known by the mind, not as it is, but as the mind represents it to itself after the data of the senses, there will be as many different worlds as there are brains, in spite of appearances and general agreements. From that flows the diversity of opinions, and from that the inanity of the notion of truth. Aside from the exact sciences which are affirmations and explanations of the principle of identity, nothing is true or false but through the need we have of it, since nothing is comparable."[13]

His adherence to such a philosophical attitude may serve to explain why it was that Gourmont became the official spokesman of Symbolism and wrote even in the early days of that movement criticisms of its members which are still living, accurate and unexcelled in sympathetic understanding. Miomandre, writing after Gourmont's death, points this out. "Symbolism, which lasted so short a time in a pure state, and which so quickly underwent so many modifications, was thus far indisputable and permanent in that it was the exact esthetic expression of a philosophical doctrine: idealism. Just as nature is the reflection

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[11] Promenades Philosophiques, II, pp. 105–106.
[12] Promenades Philosophiques, I, p. 167.
[13] Epilogues, III, p. 174.

of the creative idea, art is the reflection of the inner life of man."[14]

To speak with authority then of the true and false is ever impossible. But if about the true and false we can never be sure, perhaps there is some other guiding principle. "Beyond the true and false, one finds the useful."[15] In a higher sense, the useful is not beyond; the true and useful coincide. Now if my belief as to what is true is determined by what is useful to me, if in other words, it conforms to my physiology—(and there is nothing about which he is more insistent)—the "truths" which commend themselves to me will also be truths to many another, in so far as our objects—to continue to live is the main one—coincide. If a belief further this purpose it is good, useful, true. "An error à la mode makes an excellent truth. . . . What difference whether men believe this or that? A good truth is good, a good error is good, too."[16]

We have learned to see that even our exactest science bears the imprint of man's choice, is the creature of his creative imagination. But although Gourmont was familiar with the expression of such theories by Poincaré he does not seem to have been sufficiently impressed by their harmony with his own thought to develop them. That not only everyday opinions but the truths of which we are surest are plastic, moulded to our convenience in thinking the universe—this should have been a welcome pronouncement to Gourmont. But we must guard against overstating the case for the plasticity of the universe. Gourmont is careful not to rush on with a heedless pragmatism to say that because that seems true which is good, our beliefs can produce anything. Those are children who believe that that will happen which they wish to happen.[17] We can say only, that of truth in this sense man is the measure, that "when it is a question of distinguishing the useful from that which is not useful, men are infallible."[18]

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[14] Grande Revue, 23:1, p. 143.
[15] Epilogues, III, p. 223, note.
[16] *Op. cit.*, p. 72.
[17] A Night in the Luxembourg, translated by Arthur Ransome, p. 60.
[18] Epilogues, III, p. 223.

III. Man, who was born free, may then still be free, and know no more the exploiter's heel, nor the chains of a subtler slavery to Absolute Truth, Absolute Morals. Free, he is maker of his own world, fashioner of his own ethics. How will Gourmont, the liberator, have him conduct his life?

We have made our will our own, we say. But what does that mean? If that will is part of an endless chain of events linked as cause and effect, our hard-won freedom may mean only the sense that if we are caused it is at least by forces beyond our control. Now "will is nothing other than the declaration made by our mind, that of two motives one is stronger than the other. Will is perhaps the least voluntary and least free thing in us. Before it pronounces, we are often in a state which gives us the illusion of freedom. Shall we go to the right or left? As yet we do not know. These moments of hesitation are sometimes pleasant and sometimes painful. Most frequently they pass unnoticed and quite unawares we find ourselves involved in one of the two courses of action. The will has acted mechanically. Our mind has functioned like an automatic balance. . . . Whatever be the act which we accomplish, it has a cause, and that cause itself depends on another cause, and so on to infinity. . . . None of our actions is the beginning of a series. There is only one series, which seems never to have had a beginning, the end of which it is impossible to foresee. . . . We are not free and we cannot act without thinking ourselves free. If we ceased for an instant to believe practically in free will, we should immediately cease to act. . . . The illusion of freedom is as inexplicable as it is certain, and, I might add, necessary."[19]

But the almost unshakeable conviction that we are free agents must have some better reason to offer than those moments when we are so beaten upon by contrary winds that we are borne nowhither. Search must reveal another way in which the illusion of freedom arises, a way which perhaps will enable us to see it as no illusion. "From the diversity of human aptitudes, from man's power of gaining by all sorts of different ways the necessary end of his activity, or of avoiding that end and putting

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[19] Promenades Philosophiques, II, pp. 148–149.

an end in himself to the species of which he bears the future, has been born the belief in liberty. It is an illusion which it is difficult not to have, and an idea which one must banish if one is to think in a way which is not entirely unreasonable; but it is certain that practically the multiplicity of possible activities is almost equivalent to liberty."[20] It is doubtless, he would say, always the strongest motive which determines us; but the strongest today will be the weakest tomorrow; hence, a variety in the march of human affairs which wears the mask of freedom, and in fact has almost similar effects. Free will is nothing but the faculty of being determined successively by a very large number of very different motives. "As soon as choice is possible, there is freedom, even though the act chosen be vigorously determined and though it be impossible that it should not have taken place. The animals have a lesser liberty, the more restricted as their aptitudes are more limited, but where there is life there is liberty. From this point of view, the distinction between man and the animals is one of quantity, not of quality."

Freedom wherever there is intelligence, and proportioned to that intelligence,—such would seem to be Gourmont's solution of the age-old problem. It only remains for the neurologist to translate it into terms of increasingly complex neuron patterns. In his view freedom is limited, relative; it is measured by the ability to secure one's end under infinitely varied circumstances. Perhaps this ability is even more limited than we usually think. "All intelligence is limited. It is this very encounter with the limits, with the wall, which, by the pain it causes, begets consciousness. Let us not laugh too heartily at the bees joyfully garnishing the movable combs of their artificial hives. We are perhaps the slaves of a master who exploits us and whom we shall never know."[21] All of which makes Gourmont perhaps more earnest that we shall not be the slaves of any masters that we do know and can guard against.

IV. Rather, then, than emphasize the difference between ourselves and other animals, Gourmont is anxious to put us back

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[20] Physique de l'Amour, pp. 10–11.

in our proper place, among them, to assure us that any acceptable system of morality must be based squarely upon our nature as animals, must accord with our physiology. "Man separated from the rest of nature is pure mystery. In order to understand something about ourselves we must humbly thrust ourselves back into the biological setting from which religious pride has drawn us to elevate us to the dignity of puppet of the ideal."[22] It was to drive home this lesson that Gourmont made his study of sex throughout the animal world. His desire, he asserts at the beginning of the Physique de l'Amour, is "to place man's sexual life in the single plane of universal sexuality."[23]

It is the chief fault of the philosophy of the past that it has failed to do just this. "When we come to define the philosophy of the nineteenth century, we shall see that it was merely theology."[24] Gourmont is eager, on the other hand, to reduce man to what he regards as his proper place in nature, so eager in fact that he relaxes his usual critical vigilance to accept overreadily the scientific generalizations of Quinton, which placed the birds and not man at the top of the evolutionary scale. Darwin years before had written in eloquent conclusion to The Descent of Man: "We must, however, acknowledge, as it seems to me, that man with all his noble qualities, with sympathy which feels for the most debased, with benevolence which extends not only to other men, but to the humblest living creature, with his God-like intellect, which has penetrated into the movements and constitution of the solar system—with all these exalted powers—man still bears in his bodily frame the indelible stamp of his lowly origin."[25] Less apologetically, Gourmont maintains that man is animal and mortal. "Man is an animal that has 'arrived,' that's all."[26] A distinguishable and immortal entity, the soul, is beyond our ken. A reversal of the usual belief would be truer: "It is only the soul

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[21] *Op. cit.*, p. 216.
[22] Promenades Philosophiques, I, p. 133.
[23] Physique de l'Amour, p. 5.
[24] Promenades Philosophiques, III, p. 263.
[25] Darwin, Descent of Man, II, p. 797.
[26] Promenades Philosophiques, III, p. 265.

that is mortal."[27] Body, matter, lives on, undiminished in quantity, though changed in form. Soul and body are two aspects of the same living organism, to separate which in thought is to introduce a whole series of grave errors. For Gourmont, "man is a whole in which it is difficult for analysis to discover the ancient duality of body and soul. . . . The soul is corporeal and the body is spiritual."[28] The nature and intimacy of the relation between the two is hinted at in a paragraph written years later, in which he calls the soul the synthesis and essence of the body. "We are far today, in spite of the outgrown theories of our philosophers à la mode, from making of the soul and body two forces opposed to each other, and, as used to be believed, engaged in a perpetual warfare. What we call the soul is only an odor, perfume or poison, in which the powers of the organs are summed up. To breathe the soul is to breathe the body in its purest, most easily assimilable form."[29]

V. Such distinctions between man and his lowly brothers failing, in what does man's having arrived consist? Some recent thinkers would answer that biologically and psychologically man has reached a stopping point because he has come to rely for survival on social organization rather than individual efficiency. Gourmont is more interested in the reaching than in the stopping-point. He answers that man has arrived because he is an inventive animal; his inventive genius depends in turn upon his more ample intelligence, and its physical basis, the larger brain. Man's intelligence, the result of variation, is a happy chance in the evolutionary process, preserved because it gave greater possibilities of survival. "The most probable opinion is that intelligence is an excrescence, like an oak apple. To what insect's bite do we owe it? We shall never know."[30] Perhaps the purely physical cause of man's genius is the glacial epoch. "Even if man, the tropical animal, was able to live without intelligence before the glacial periods, he could traverse

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[27] *Op. cit.*, p. 282.
[28] Les Chevaux de Diomède, I.
[29] Lettres à l'Amazone, p. 105.
[30] Decadence, p. 40.

those periods only thanks to his intellectual activity."[31] Since that period, his intelligence, based on an unchanging physiology, has remained through the ages fundamentally unchanged in power, as the genius necessary to achieve the great early discoveries and inventions shows. He names his conviction the Law of Intellectual Constancy. This law derives support from a consideration not only of skull capacities and the like, but from the history of intellectual achievements. The inventions on which we pride ourselves are the natural result of an ever increasing background, and demand no higher powers of origination than some that are so old we have forgotten what genius they manifest. "The inventions which are at the very basis of our civilization and without which a civilization is impossible, almost all go back to the prehistoric and perhaps to the Stone Age."[32]

If freedom and mental complexity are both matters of degree, and interdependent, it is not irrelevant to our discussion to point out that mind has a lowly origin, beginning in "purely mechanical movements of living matter under the influence of external agents,"[33]—movements alike whether we are speaking of tropisms, reflexes, instincts, or intelligence, in that their purpose is to adapt the organism to its environment.

VI. Philosophy, which is a commentary on life, on life as a whole, must be scientific; it must not exalt the reason unduly, but must accept the account science gives us of the mind and its origin. But, as we have said, though mind is a thing produced, and though there be no such thing as pure reason, nevertheless intelligence has its functions. Intelligence, personified in the critic, judges, weighs, evaluates. Gourmont even goes so far as to say, contradicting himself, that it creates. "Facts have a very great, but passing value. Those that are true today will be false tomorrow, because their exactitude depends, not upon a changeless reality outside of us, but upon an internal reality, mobile and changing as human psychology. The human mind is the true creator of nature, in proportion as it contemplates her, weighs and measures her. A new method of evaluation of

[31] Promenades Philosophiques, II, p. 41.
[32] *Op. cit.*, pp. 33–34.
[33] Promenades Philosophiques, III, pp. 49–50.

forces institutes greater changes in nature than the play of natural forces itself."[34]

It is just here that the critic, like the philosopher, has his function. Both are creators of values. The great French critical tradition runs through Boileau, Voltaire, La Harpe, Sainte-Beuve;[35] all have done this, and it is to this select group that Gourmont belongs, as transvaluer of values. "Generally speaking, the greatest effort of a religious or philosophical innovation is to put at the end what was originally at the beginning, or vice versa."[36]

If on the one hand it is true that man's choice has contributed to his picture of the world he lives in, yet on the other any true history of freedom of thought must take account of the scientist's growing independence of narrow and personal interests. As Professor Joseph Jastrow puts it: "Viewed retrospectively, the greatest triumph of the human mind was the gradual removal of large areas of belief from the influence of the personal psychology of conviction. Scientifically established truth came to proceed objectively, undisturbed by interest in the outcome of inquiry and determined by the sanction of verification. The gradual disestablishment of the anthropocentric view of the universe culminated in the removal of human desire from its place of dominance in the formation of belief. The process is but partially accomplished even in disciplined minds."[37]

Whether or not Gourmont ever put so high a value on impersonality or not, he does value and use his freedom as a thinker chiefly to disestablish the views of things formed by human desire. Out of some such view comes what many have regarded as his most valuable method, that of the dissociation of ideas. He is peculiarly aware that "man associates ideas, not at all in accordance with verifiable exactitude, but with his pleasure and interest."[38] The associated ideas then pass as a truth, perhaps accepted overcarelessly by most, or held overlong,

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[34] Promenades Philosophiques, I, pp. 19–20.
[35] *Op. cit.*, pp. 33.
[36] Decadence, p. 46.
[37] Jastrow, J., The Psychology of Conviction, p. 34, Houghton, Boston, 1918.
[38] Decadence, p. 11.

although it be to their ultimate damage and hurt. It is, I suppose, for this reason that the critic must not only doubt; he must destroy; the critic who dissociates ideas, that is, kills ancient truths, plays a necessary and salutary part. "A truth is dead when it has been shown that the relations between the elements is habitual and not necessary. . . . The death of a truth is a great benefit for mankind."[39] [40]

The difficulty we have in breaking down such long continued associations of ideas scarcely exists for Gourmont. His freedom as a thinker is chiefly useful in that it does liberate him from such pseudo-necessities of thought. It is a task for which Gourmont is by temperament very well fitted, but which he could only illustrate and begin. "There are," he says, "a very large number of ideas that are never employed by men in their pure state, either because they have not yet been dissociated or because this dissociation has been incapable of achieving stability."[41] It is an unexpected concern for logic rather than pleasure which is Gourmont's reason for continuing his trade of truth-killer, in spite of the fact that these truths have come into existence in a manner singularly fitted, one would think, to gain his approval. "Men's principal occupation is the pursuit

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[39] *Op. cit.*, p. 18.

[40] The idea is not entirely novel. J. S. Mill, who went perhaps further than Gourmont in asserting that beliefs are the result only of repeated experience, propounds a somewhat similar theory. "The 'necessity' of a belief is due solely to the difficulty we have in breaking down an association between particular ideas; we need only suppose a connection to have been so frequent and undeviating between two ideas as to make them practically inseparable, to have all that is required to account for so-called necessities of thought. It follows that any such necessity might conceivably be overborne by fresh experience." (Rogers, English and American Philosophy since 1800, pp. 80–81. MacMillan, N. Y., 1922.)

Similarly Hoffding (Outlines of Psychology, 1893, p. 152): "Associations of ideas may . . . be so firm and constant that it is forgotten out of what elements they have arisen. Some of the greatest mysteries in the province of psychology owe their origin to such deeply rooted associations of ideas, the beginning and history of which have been forgotten . . . that which presents itself to us as a unity as as necessarily coherent, may yet have arisen from the fusing of different elements. It demands therefore a deeper and more extensive psychological analysis than the dogmatizing psychology enters into. Such an analysis finds an especial application in the associations which have not been formed in the actual consciousness of the individual, but are the bequest of earlier generations . . ."

[41] Decadence, p. 32.

of happiness, and they are much more concerned with their interests than with the rules of logic."[42]

Gourmont's whole attitude would lead us to believe that this is the only sort of reasoning that is practically valuable, that it is just this human interest that matters in the long run, and neither logic nor facts. Still this new devotion to logic must not be taken too seriously, for logic is perhaps not so strict a master as we have thought, but rather infinitely complaisant.[43] It is only, I believe, in the light of the fact that men's old reasoning fails to keep pace with their new interests, that we can allow Gourmont to escape the charge of contradiction here. For if he here aims to reason in accordance with logic and so correct the ideas which have been associated only in accordance with men's interests, at other times he points out that logic is twice removed from reality, depending as it does upon facts, which go back to human interest,—a sort of inverted Platonism.

Many of the associations to be dissociated are known as laws. Perceiving, or thinking we perceive similarities between things, we have lost sight of the things themselves, which are the only reality. The mere making of categories is a valueless, pedantic task, a confession of impotence. The laws of the scientist are as bad. "When they cannot explain a mechanism, they declare that its movements are due to a law. Bodies fall by virtue of the law of gravitation. This has precisely the same value, in the serious order, as the comic virtus dormitiva."[44]

After all, what is a law?—merely an abbreviated way of saying what happens for the most part. "There are no rules; there are only facts which we group in ways perceptible to our intelligence, facts always provisional, the whole nature of which would be changed by a change in perspective. The notion of rule, the notion of law, these are confessions of our impotence to pursue the genealogy of a fact to its logical origins. Law is a way of saying a thing, an abbreviation, a point of repose. The law is half the facts plus one. Every law is at the mercy of an

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[42] *Op. cit.*, p. 34.
[43] La Culture des Idées, p. 70.
[44] Decadence, p. 49.

accident, of a fact unexpectedly met; and yet, without the idea of law, all our knowledge would be night."[45]

For any philosophy based exclusively on life, one great object must be to rid man of those fears which paralyze life. Thus Epicurus sought to free his disciples from the haunting fear of death, the paralysing belief in gods who interfered. The more subtle fears of the modern idealist are the ineluctable fact, the immutable law. Gourmont has exorcised these terrors, clearing the way for a philosophy which knows nothing more absolute than life and the sensibility of living beings.

As for logic, it is "the product of the facts, not their producer."[46] It is absurd to reason, as he says Kant does, that a thing is so because it must be so. The necessity flows from life, from the being—not the opposite. "That which is necessary, that which is reasonable, is what is; but any other manner of being, once in existence, would be equally necessary and reasonable."[47] A reasonable theory of truth must then be based on life, on man's essentially animal nature, on its usefulness to that animal life. Things out of relation to our senses are of little significance or value. Far from wishing to force human logic into nature, Gourmont's hope is that he may be able to introduce into the old classical logic a little natural logic.

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[45] Physique de l'Amour, pp. 106–107.
[46] Promenades Philosophiques, I, p. 130.
[47] *Op. cit.*, pp. 129–130.

## II

### The Scientific Foundation

I. It becomes apparent from our analysis of his attitude toward truth and liberty that Gourmont's is above all a scientific philosophy. "There is but one philosophy worthy of the name: scientific philosophy."[1] Philosophy must accept the findings of science, remain ever-ready to conform to the body of scientific truth or changes therein, and profess nothing inconsistent with science, not allowing its desire for a comfortable mental world to warp its commentary on the world that is. As Gourmont is aware even those who have been loudest in proclaiming their adherence to a scientific ideal have not always succeeded. He states that Bacon, for instance, has given us in his method only a sketch, and continues: "he is a lyric poet with glimmerings of philosophy."[2] "He has a notion of what ought to be done, but one so confused that when he himself undertakes the operation, it seems so awkward that the principles which have guided him are thereby jeopardized."[3] "Bacon, drawing up the general principles of scientific research, misinterpreted them himself on almost every page of the greater part of his writings."[4] Curiously very much the same criticism holds of Gourmont himself; with all his enthusiasm for science, he relies for his own observations on society upon a brilliant intuition rather than upon scientific method. Indeed, he never fully recognized the need of science, nor its method of procedure in the field of social science.

II. What does Gourmont conceive to be the dicta of science important from a philosophic point of view? What does science, as the much abused phrase has it, tell us of the universe, of man, and his place in it?

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[1] *Op. cit.*, p. 133.
[2] *Op. cit.*, p. 21.
[3] *Op. cit.*, p. 12.
[4] *Op. cit.*, p. 8.

To Gourmont, as to Bertrand Russell, the world which Science presents for our acceptance is purposeless, void of meaning. "Amid such a world, if anywhere, our ideals henceforward must find a home. That Man is the product of causes which had no prevision of the end they were achieving; that his origin, his growth, his hopes and fears, his loves and beliefs, are but the outcome of accidental collocations of atoms; that no fire, no heroism, no intensity of thought and feeling, can preserve an individual life beyond the grave; that all the labors of the ages, all the devotion, all the inspiration, all the noonday brightness of human genius, are destined to extinction in the vast death of the solar system, and that the whole temple of Man's achievement must inevitably be buried beneath the debris of a universe in ruins—all these things, if not quite beyond dispute, are yet so nearly certain, that no philosophy which rejects them can hope to stand. Only within the scaffoldings of these truths, only on the firm foundations of unyielding despair, can the soul's habitation henceforth be safely built."[5] That Gourmont agrees substantially as to the foundation, however different the soul's habitation which he wishes to rear thereon, witness this statement: "Like the men she bears, the whole earth will die. Our dolorous life moves with absolute certitude toward total annihilation. This event, which seems stupendous to the imagination, will have just as much importance in the bosom of the infinite as the crushing of a grain of wheat in a mill. It is good to know that; it would perhaps be better not to know it. But we are too late. Besides . . . the spring of life is not hope, but the pleasure of exercising our activity."[6]

Man's place in such a universe is of the slightest importance, his power negligible. "All that tends to weaken this notion of the absolute dependence of man, an atom carried down the whirlpool of effects and causes, is but the puerile protest of enfeebled brains."[7]

If these seem but the commonplaces of pessimism, leading to an ethics of resignation or pity, it is well to remember Gourmont's

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[5] Russell, B., Philosophical Essays, p. 61. Longmans, London, 1910.
[6] Epilogues, III, p. 60.
[7] *Op. cit.*, p. 23.

criticism of Leopardi, and his declaration: "Pessimism is not acceptable, no more than optimism for that matter."[8] To the moral that he draws from this darker aspect of science we shall return later.

III. In such a universe our conduct of a life which "is nothing, since it is continually dying, and which is everything, since it is continually reborn"[9] which is indefinable, and yet for us the supreme fact, depends upon a knowledge of man's true nature and his relation to the whole. "We must have a matter-of-fact, every-day philosophy, scientific, always provisional, always submissive to the new fact, which is bound to arise, a philosophy which is only a commentary on life, but on all of life."[10]

To all of us who are concerned with the conduct of life, science can give no more valuable aid than by determining the aim of life, for the good life must be that which reaches the goal of all life most easily and directly. If we can find no one thing that life aims at "for the most part" but its own maintenance and the spread of life, then it is in these terms that we must define its purpose.

"What is the goal of life? The maintenance of life.

"But the very idea of goal is a human illusion. There is neither beginning, nor middle, nor end in the series of causes. That which is has been caused by that which was, and that which will be has for its cause that which is. It is impossible to conceive of either a point of repose, or a point of beginning. Born of life, life will eternally beget life. That is alike its duty and its desire. Now, life on this earth is characterized by the existence of individuals grouped in species, that is to say, having the power, when a male is united with a female, of reproducing their like. . . . The sexual act istherefore the most important of all acts."[11]

We who wear the label of living being have then no choice; this is our purpose—we may realize it, but we may choose no other. The martyr is for Gourmont only stubborn and mistaken. That in assigning him to the class living being he has been

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[8] Promenades Philosophiques, I, p. 52.
[9] Promenades Philosophiques, III, p. 242.
[10] Promenades Philosophiques, I, p. 133.
[11] Physique de l'Amour, pp. 14–15.

rather arbitrary, that his guess may have been unjustified and the man belong even more to the class, adherent of a certain idea—these are considerations which apparently do not occur to Gourmont; or if they do, are summed up in the assertion, to him laughable, that man's ends may have nothing to do with nature's. We may object that the least common denominator of a group may not be the most characteristic thing about an individual member of that group. "Give your head to be cut off to defend some ideas which you have in your head? Excellent!"[12] exclaims Gourmont scornfully. He cannot see himself a martyr in the least. "In the first place, I have very few ideas. Then, I don't cling to them at all. I have reflected enough to become aware of the fact that quite opposite ideas might very well have suited me, if I had received a different brain. A martyr because you have a few cells more or less in one compartment than in the other!"[13]

At the same time, if to us as passionless observers of life, it is obvious that life desires only its own continuance, nevertheless as sentient beings we must desire a good life, that is, a happy life. "It is obvious that, from the day on which man acquired the certainty that the present life is the only one on which he can count, he could give to life, this short life, no other aim than happiness."[14]

IV. If we ask of Government a more definite meaning for a rather vague term, we learn that as truth is determined by our senses, the good is much more so determined. "That which is good, that which is moral, is what is pleasant to us, that which serves the turn of our present sensibility."[15] Pleasure is, to be sure, an ideal little esteemed by the moralists, but in practice we find that the immorality which in our theories we deny is the "sole object of our dreams, our desires, our conversation, our action, our meditations, our dissertations, our art, and our science."[16] This is a state of affairs that often we refuse to

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[12] Epilogues, V, p. 97.
[13] *Op. cit.*, p. 96.
[14] Promenades Philosophiques, II, pp. 295–296.
[15] Epilogues, IV, p. 267.
[16] Promenades Philosophiques, III, p. 219.

recognize; our moral teachers have had their way with our education so long. So much the worse for us, and them. "That is a singular moral code which makes one see in pleasure a diminution of oneself. Some men have reached such a point that they experience a sort of shame for the joy which they have derived from their secret senses. And it is not hypocrisy; they are sincere; their shame is a real one. The freest feel it or have felt it, if not before themselves, before their brothers. To what a depth have not the obscure forces of Christianity ravaged our natural conscience!"[17] Church and moralists have proclaimed one thing, but civilization has in reality consisted in the development of quite the opposite. The moralists devote their attention to the ideals of duty, solidarity, sacrifice, but never will you hear them giving the slightest place to pleasure. It may, nevertheless, he claims, serve very well as an ideal, very favorable to the development and greatness of humanity. This ideal once accepted, we are no longer concerned with obeying uncomprehendingly a code of arbitrary prescriptions; we are interested only in being happy, but that is difficult enough to merit some attention, more than it has ever received.

[17] Lettres à l'Amazone, p. 93.

## III

### The Hedonic Superstructure

I. The development of such a philosophy of pleasure must wait upon the still undeveloped science of pleasure, which would be a branch of biology. A first step in the right direction, however, would seem to be to look down upon none of our physiological functions,[1] breathing, eating, sleeping, upon which life depends. We have made the mistake in the past of cultivating other and more artificial pleasures; we need to be reminded that these functions and our senses are far from giving us all the pleasure which we might well derive from them.

But do no doubts as to the possibility of this earthly happiness, which is the only kind we are ever to know, cross Gourmont's mind? If it is possible, he admits that analysis destroys it. "Only those enjoy life who are unconscious of their enjoyment. The happy man has only the appearance of being happy,"[2] says one of his characters, who seems to speak for him. To be happy one must live as a little child, or better, as an animal.

Perhaps happiness lies forever just beyond our reach; it may be like a man's elbow,—near, but he cannot bite it. Still, two answers may be made to this prejudice, as Gourmont calls it, that it is impossible to attain happiness. Since this does not prevent our desiring it, such an idea taints life and renders it often insupportable. Anything which opposes our prime purpose as living beings is pernicious, and he would seem to say that we must put it behind our backs and forget.[3] We must learn, then, to love life for itself, not for its happiness. The idea is refined, perhaps perverse, and will bear expansion in his own words. "Boredom is not a delicious sentiment," he admits in inviting us thereto, "It is a naked feeling as I conceive it and as I love its contact. In it one feels life

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[1] For a recent attempt at an ethics based on physiology, see Givler, R. C., The Ethics of Hercules, Knopf, N. Y., 1924.

[2] Epilogues, III, p. 175.

[3] Promenades Philosophiques, III, p. 227.

stripped of all its adornments, reduced to itself, to its own charms alone which reduce to this: being. I keep trying to explain that, that we must learn to enjoy life in itself, dissociated from the idea of happiness, that chimera that spoils its best moments, that draws us at every instant outside ourselves and places us at the mercy of every irony that promises us it."[4] Thus the disillusioned Epicurean of the last years, of of whom we shall say more later. There is implicit here a transition to a view perhaps more in line with Gourmont's whole philosophy, namely, his objection that happiness is just another of those abstractions which do us so much harm, inciting us to the quest of the absolute in all things. "Happiness does not exist, but there are bits of happiness."[5] These we can seek, and seeking, find. A propos of his cat's fruitless attempts to catch the birds that fly past the window, he writes "that one may sometimes snatch a feather from the wings of happiness, a vain feather, a dead feather, good for nothing but to write the story of the dreams the shadow or the wings of which one has seen pass over life."[6] This content with the partial, even the vain, if it is all that is possible, is a note sounded in many other places, for instance in the curious story, Le Fantôme. "I do not seek the absolute," said Hyacinthe, "sensations alone, even though incomplete, give me life. I am willing they should be vain, if their vanity is sweet to me."[7]

The extraction of some small good from much evil is a method which enables us to see at least this much good in the pessimist's picture of our lot: our momentary happy states could not be fully appreciated if they were not interrupted by neutral or even painful states. Even the pessimist admits that we must choose between the life and death he sets before us. "Once one has chosen to live, it is reasonable to do one's best to adjust oneself to life."[8] A reasonable philosophy of conduct would begin

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[4] Lettres à l'Amazone, pp. 153–154.
[5] Promenade Philosophiques, I, p. 51.
[6] Petits Crayons, p. 129.
[7] Pèlerin du Silence, p. 65.
[8] Promenades Philosophiques, I, p. 50.

here; this is the real question suggested but not answeed by the pessimist; the philosophical value of pessimism is extremely slight; it is scarcely a philosophy at all, but rather literature, and too often rhetoric.[9]

"The wise man," then, "will find means of living his life to the full and enjoying it to the very last. He will never have great disappointments, for he has never had extravagant hopes."[10]

II. We can proceed with such a search for happiness only if we have confidence in life, a confidence which the naïve creature of nature has, whether life treat him for the nonce well or ill, but which we civilized men have almost lost. "Everyone, then, must love his life, even though it be not very lovable, for it is the only one."[11] This has curious overtones of the Kantian "We can because we must," with which Gourmont was in such thorough disagreement. We have no sufficient guarantee of that beyond upon which many would like to depend to compensate them for the ills of this life. For "eternity is not situated beyond lfie but in life itself, shared by all men, by all living beings."[12]

Life is action. If we are to act, it must be on the basis of such relative and imperfect knowledge as we possess. That hope which is necessary for action would vanish with certain knowledge, and along with it would go the interest and charm of life. "She is indecipherable, illogical and uncertain, and it is for that reason that those hardest to please love her with a melancholy passion. If the secret of the enigma were whispered in our ear about the period of the age of reason, could we still live? Having no more incertitude, we should not long have any hope."[13]

If complete certitude would be fatal, it is in another sense impossible. "If before acting, we had always to be in possession of the truth, action would be impossible."[14] For action we

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[9] *Op. cit.*, p. 50.
[10] Promenades Philosophiques, II, p. 292.
[11] Promenades Philosophiques, III, p. 243.
[12] *Loc. cit.*
[13] Epilogues, II, p. 79.
[14] Promenades Philosophiques, I, p. 196.

must have confidence in life; confidence in self, too. "If one esteemed oneself at one's true value, one would not esteem oneself enough."[15] For if the only ethic is to be happy, to conquer pain, confidence in oneself is the supreme conqueror of moral pain; physical pain may be left to the doctors.[16] If this confidence in life and self be an illusion, it is a necessary one, like the belief that we are shaping the course of our action for ourselves, the lack of which would put an end to all action.

An understanding of the facts of life makes happiness, fragmentary though it be, our only possible aim. Its realization is at least partially possible if we do not paralyze our action by wrong attitudes, futile methods. But to have seen one's aim clearly and realized the illusoriness of all others is usually to have glimpsed the method.

Formulated in the most general terms Gourmont's advice is to dominate life, or, more humbly, to adjust ourselves to life so as to extract its pleasures. Here again freedom comes to his mind. Part of our method must be, while not trying to detach ourselves from that nature to which in our essential animality we belong, to cultivate "a sort of disdainful disinterestedness which increases our power over things by enhancing our feeling of freedom."[17]

From the standpoint of certain newer developments we may re-interpret what is latent in the thought of Gourmont. Prof. E. B. Holt, emphasizing the importance to right conduct of knowledge of facts outside ourselves, and so selection or harmonization among the wishes within, concluded that a person who has not achieved such harmony, along whose nerves travel antagonistic innervations, "is not free to take any of the courses, but in every case is hampered and held back by his own opposed inclinations. This is indeed the very serfdom of the will. And freedom, like virtue, comes through discrimination, *i. e.*, wisdom. The person in whom there are no suppressions, in whom the

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[15] Promenades Philosophiques, II, p. 239.
[16] A Night in the Luxembourg, pp. 78–79.
[17] Promenades Philosophiques, I, p. 78.

process of discrimination and integration has gone on successfully, throws his whole force into whatever he does; he does it without constraint. This person has 'free-will'."[18] To this psychologist morality and freedom are closely related, and in some sort it is an adjustment of oneself to the facts of life that gives both these objects. As he puts it more positively, "In those happy individuals in whom the daily integration of behavior is successfully accomplished the soul is a unit and a moral unit. In others in whom the integration has been frustrated the soul is not a unit, but a collection of warring factions seated in one distracted body. Such a creature has not one soul, but many, and misses of morals and of freedom by exactly as much as it has missed of unity, that is, of the progressive integration of its behavior."[19]

III. But we must return to an aspect of the matter that we have been forgetting, and that Gourmont never forgets, the extracting from life of its pleasures. Others, mindful of the ever-increasing multiplicity of our desires and life's incapacity to satisfy them all, would have us strike a balance between desire and desire-satisfying things by curtailing sharply our desires, achieving peace perhaps when we desire no longer. Provisionally, Gourmont will go so far in sympathy as to say: "We must not look down upon chastity, we must not disdain asceticism."[20] This guarded appreciation of an attitude with which, certainly, he has little in common may indicate only a neglect on his part, a failure to think the problem through to a solution. Gourmont's answer, we may suppose would be that it is a rather pathetic fallacy to think that every problem has a solution, except in so far as the necessity of action may force one to close one's mind like a steel trap and to play one's part strenuously, though perhaps, to later reflection, wrongly. The 'horrible mania for certitude,' for dogmatic theory, is essentially a malady of the people, of herd-thinking. Gourmont is so conscious of the tragi-comic character of the

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[18] Holt, E. B., The Freudian Wish, p. 142.
[19] *Op. cit.*, pp. 200–201.
[20] Physique de l'Amour, p. 235.

periods of certitude man has passed through, and the hateful, fanatical character of the men of those periods, with their 'Think as I do, or I shall kill you,' that he rebounds into an attitude quite the opposite. Judgments must always be provisional; but given the human penchant for clinging to old friends among judgments, he is almost ready to say that we had better retain our freedom by forming no judgments at all.[21] The issue is clear cut between a belief that may lead us we know not whither and intellectual freedom to be preserved with all possible caution. "In brief, the human mind is capable of only two states, the state of faith and the state of incredulity: believe in Justice and believe in the Holy Virgin, is equally to leave certitude for the country of dogmas, hypotheses, desires and dreams."[22]

At any rate, in this case Gourmont's ideal is far from asceticism, far from restraint. Neither for Epicurus nor for him is life a race toward a distant goal, a hypothetical reward. We know so little of the purposes of life that the wise man will be content to live his hours, his minutes, to aim at only the most immediate future, living as if he were never to die, gathering the present moment as if it were eternal. If we are to live, let us live, forgetting that death is our destiny, remembering it only when life becomes insupportable, and its certain end a grateful prospect.[23]

IV. One of the friends whose conversations form Les Dialogues des Amateurs sur les Choses du Temps maintains that his moral principle, hypocrisy, is that of all good men, and proffers the Rabelaisian advice: "There is only one principle for the conduct of life: do everything you like, but don't let anyone know it."[24] The first step in the modification of the apparently limitless license of such statements lies in the fact that for the sensualist himself, if life is to retain its savour, bodily equilibrium is necessary. But how slight is the admission of anything that might be called an ascetic element is shown by the whole tone of Gourmont's writing. Epicurus never said iron-

[21] Epilogues, II., pp. 79–84.
[22] Promenades Philosophiques, I, pp. 65–66.
[23] A Night in the Luxembourg, p. 80.
[24] Epilogues, IV, p. 46.

ically: "Be miserable now, that you may be happy later." Rather, "he says to us: Come to terms with life, the life every day, so as to derive from it all the pleasures it contains. Use to that end all the senses which nature has given you. Neglect none. Learn to enjoy the light, and the diverse aspects, continually changing, which it gives to the objects it bathes. Learn to listen to the harmonies of nature. Learn to delight in the delicate taste of the food which cheers you. Learn also, when you yield to love, to utilize these divine moments for the greatest possible joy of your sensibility. In a word, learn to live in the present, to delight in life."[25]

If these seem doctrines that better become a disciple of Aristippus or of Yang Chu than a follower of Epicurus, we must remember that the philosopher of Gourmont's admiration is in no way the frugal sage of academic tradition or of the letter to Menoeceus. The teachers who would have us believe that Epicurus himself was no Epicurean are stifling our intelligence; the master himself was far too wise to disdain any kind of pleasure.[26] If for him the philosophic conversation was one of the pleasures of life, it was only one. "He wished to know, and he knew, all enjoyments that may become human enjoyments; he abused nothing, but made use of everything in his harmonious life."[27]

The Epicurean philosophy, thus interpreted, is accepted in its

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[25] Promenades Philosophiques, II, p. 296.

[26] It is scarcely necessary to point out further that Gourmont is misinterpreting the philosopher of the Garden. Epicurus did not disdain, perhaps, any sort of pleasure, but he recommended none which did not fit into a prudently organized scheme of life. He distrusted far more than Gourmont the delight of the senses. "For it is not continued drinkings and revels, or the enjoyment of female society, or feasts of fish and other such things, as a costly table supplies, that make life pleasant, but sober contemplation, which examines into the reasons for all choice and avoidance, and which puts to flight the vain opinions from which the greater part of the confusion arises which troubles the soul." (Quoted from the letter to Menoeceus in Rand, The Classical Moralists, p. 113.)

Gourmont gives us an imaginative reconstruction of the Epicurean philosophy in which he seems to sacrifice historical accuracy to his subjective need for the sanction of a great name for his sensualism. His only defence would be that Epicurus *ought* to have thought otherwise than his recorded utterances indicate.

[27] A Night in the Luxembourg, p. 44.

entirety. Gourmont is the lover of everyone who loves Epicurus. "Plato was a great poet, and Aristotle a great savant; Epicurus alone merits the name of philosophic constructor. . . . The philosophy of Epicurus was so solid and so logical, so prophetic that it is to this day in accord with the results of our researches and our experiments. The atomic theory . . . the great laws of selection and heredity, the principles of positive psychology, the aspirations to intellectual freedom, the whole system of Epicurus we admit to-day. We must likewise admit his practical morality."[28]

It is interesting to compare Gourmont's approval, to show that it is not an isolated and eccentric point of view, with that expressed by a recent writer approaching ethics from the standpoint of sociology. "The most striking and original step taken by the Greek thinkers appeared in the writings of the Sophists and Epicureans, who recognized the relativity of right, its customary derivation, and its socio-utilitarian basis. Philosophers, as such, have probably never succeeded better in grasping the true nature and import of ethical codes."[29] Something like that, at any rate, is Gourmont's feeling for Epicurus. "All the systems that you have imagined can be disproved, and that of Epicurus cannot," says the 'He' who dominates Une Nuit au Luxembourg.[30]

For him the Epicurean morality, based on the pleasure principle, is the only one which can dwell in any well made brain side by side with our knowledge in its present state. Our knowledge makes man out to be an animal that has 'arrived'; any practical system of morality must be based on the nature of the animal, on physiology. Epicurus was too good a natural philosopher to do otherwise. The ideal of duty is one "which the Christians borrowed, without understanding it very well, from the Stoics."[31]

Since then its history has been one long misfortune for man, and it is time we returned to the saner, serener philosophy of Epicurus. The philosophers who have taken

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[28] Promenades Philosophiques, II, p. 294.
[29] Barnes, H. E., in Social Forces, Vol. III: January, 1925.
[30] A Night in the Luxembourg, p. 45.
[31] Promenades Philosophiques, II, p. 295.

up and defended the duty principle come in for Gourmont's severe displeasure. "It is a good sign for our intellectual health that Helvetius is coming into style again. To-morrow it will be d'Holbach, d'Alembert, Tracy, the master of Stendhal, all the eighteenth century philosophers, so simple, so clear, so human, The absurd German metaphysics caused them to be forgotten for sixty years, but it seems that the days of revenge are here. The dry notion of abstract duty according to Kant has had its day. We are beginning to understand that man's first duty is to be happy. If not, what is life worth?"[32] Because it despises the body and exalts an indefinite and indefinable spiritual principle which must necessarily have its roots after all in the body. Duty must be abandoned in favor of a morality based on the frank acceptance of the body and the enjoyment of all the activities, conscious or unconscious, of which our bodies are capable. Then all will be well. The despised, maltreated and unsound body cannot produce a sound mind; "in like manner, Epicurus had doubtless guessed that an organism perfectly balanced in all its parts could produce only wise thoughts, useful acts."[33]

V. To follow nature is, then, the first precept of such a system. Reflection on morality leads straight back to an instinctive morality. Curiously, Gourmont, who succeeded as few can in freeing himself from the animal and savage mind that persists within us, and from the omnipresent pressure of an elaborate social system, on the plane of action would lead us back to something very like the unrestrained directness of the animal.[34] "A few tens of centuries of social life have not been enough to efface the hundreds of centuries of purely animal life, or at least life which followed all the rhythms of nature."[35] Our systems and prescriptions will be all in vain, "we shall never be wiser than nature. Let us obey her quietly."[36] To follow nature is to follow one's own nature; the moralist should

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[32] Promenades Philosophiques, III, p. 231.
[33] Promenades Philosophiques, II, p. 295.
[34] Cf. Robinson, J. H., The Mind in the Making, Chap. III. Harpers, New York, 1921.
[35] Promenades Philosophiques, III, p. 61.
[36] *Op. cit.*, p. 63.

not even prescribe how we are to follow nature. If the idealist, starting from his own sensibility, dares to generalize what has been good and bad for himself into general rules, it is only by approximation. So much every forceful nature is bound to do. "To erect into laws his personal impressions is the great effort of a man if he is sincere. If he is not, he compiles, a procedure which deceives only novices."[37] Still, the consciousness of the origin of such laws urges a more cautious statement: "He issues no laws, and if he gives advice, his counsel above all others is to obey one's highest tendency, not external rules."[38]

VI. But one can scarcely dip twice into the same Gourmont. The charge of inconsistency worries him no more than it did Pascal. So we come upon views which must decidedly modify our first statement. No system of morality based upon facts, as this claims to be, can pretend that the philosopher's sensibility is the only fact. For men living in society, custom and public opinion must always be very real facts, only partially escapable. Whether custom be entirely admirable or not, it is to be followed, just because it is custom, until it can be changed, because it is the most solid of social bonds. A moral system universally applicable must make this restriction, then, to the hedonist's program, that his pleasure must not be anti-social. "There is the only immorality which a society wholly free of the religious spirit can admit."[39] The admission is large and gives a society protecting itself for the general welfare rights to curb individual freedom which Gourmont never developes, which in fact he rather belittles.

This admission at least serves to point out that, if at present we have no better guide than usage, the task of the future will be to work out a morality consonant on the one hand with biology, the nature and instincts of the individual, and on the other hand with social needs. Beyond both and summing them up, lies the Principle of Utility. By this, the only sound principle of

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[37] Lettres à l'Amazone, p. 32.
[38] Epilogues, III, p. 175.
[39] Epilogues, IV, p. 267.

thought and action, Gourmont means that "when it is a question of distinguishing the useful from that which is not useful, men are infallible. Our reason revolts in vain, we must at last recognize that."[40] To prescribe to mankind what you think most useful for society is a futile business at best. If, on the other hand, utilities are diverse and a frequent cause of conflict, it is still somehow true that social as well as individual interests will be most adequately met by allowing every man to follow the gleam of his own desire. The road that each follows is a matter of indifference, "provided he find at the end and along the road freedom of mind and the full development of his faculties."[41] The cause of all men and of future men will be best served by the freedom and full development of each individual now. He thinks that the general acceptance of Epicurean morality by all, humble as well as powerful, poor as well as rich, would, instead of increasing the element of conflict in human life, render it simpler, sweeter, more humane. "Would the rich Epicurean," he asks, "resolved to be completely happy, tolerate misery around him, would he consent, to enrich himself still more, to exploit the needs of other men? That would be to have understood nothing of the principles of this beautiful, wise philosophy."[42]

Why? Gourmont's injunction, "Do not judge by the intellect the affairs of sensibility"[43] forbids us to attribute the Epicurean's humane conduct to his perception of human interrelationships. Gourmont appears to think that it is enough that the world's pain would matter to him only as it touched his sensibility. But surely enough of the world's misery is caused unthinkingly, at long range, by pleasure- or profit-seekers, charming and kind in their immediate personal relationships, where to cause a pain is to see and in a measure to feel one, to give him pause. Nor can we think of our happy sage as coerced by his conscience. That still, small voice which we hear, is, as James Harvey Robinson has called it, "the still, small voice of the herd."

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[40] Epilogues, III, 223.
[41] Lettres à l'Amazone, p. 220.
[42] Promenades Philosophiques, II, p. 296.
[43] A Night in the Luxembourg, p. 79.

"The pretended cries of universal conscience are . . . only the echo of the words of our teachers; we may admit them as useful traditions, not as principles."[44] This is a last misunderstanding that he must guard against: a certain spurious liberalism will perhaps agree to a personal morality summed up in the injunction to each to obey his conscience. This would be only a distortion of the Gourmontian ethics. For him "our moral conscience is, for the most part, only an instrument acquired by habit, imposed by authority. Not having been made especially for us, it serves only to trouble us."[45] This line of thought, too, leads to the conclusion that "the basis of our customary morality ought then to be freedom, and our legislation on morals laissez-faire."[46]

For whatever reason his anarchistic sympathies may lead him to give, Gourmont thinks that the role of social control is a diminishing one; the individual is, and shall be more and more, exalted above societies, states, peoples, "for words are but words, and man is man."[47] In short, he approaches the principle of religious morality, for which each soul exists unique and sacred; each soul must work out its own salvation. The highest civilization is that in which he is left freest to do this.[48] The best index of the state of culture of a people is the opportunity of the individual for full development of body and soul, including the morality appropriate to each man. But even in the least auspicious circumstances a true individual freedom is not too much interfered with. For liberty is an internal joy, and a man is less free when he makes a parade of his liberty by revolting against the customs, prejudices and traditions of his time and place. One of his most sympathetic critics follows him in stating this at best half-truth as follows: "The mind, the imagination, is the proper domain of freedom. The body, the outer world, is the proper domain of fraternal deference."[49] At least this is a solution for those not strong enough to follow a freer

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[44] Epilogues, III, p. 76.
[45] Epilogues, II, p. 164.
[46] *Loc. cit.*
[47] Les Chevaux de Diomède, p. 62.
[48] Decadence, p. 12.
[49] Pound, Ezra, in Fortnightly, 104: p. 1163.

philosophy without despair.[50] As for the strong man, fortune has smiled on him, and he may hope to achieve a more substantial freedom, a more satisfying salvation. Such a man must have power over things, confidence in himself. His power and his confidence are the really admirable things of life, his freedom and salvation the really desirable things. Our glorification of pain has been only a rationalization, like our praise of work. The real goods are pleasure, and the leisure, the beauty, the fortune which make it possible. He finds it difficult to see what nobility can be derived from the loss of these things. The consequence of such losses is usually depression, diminution of strength. "Now, if nobility, virtue and beauty are anywhere, they are in strength, in activity, in harmony."[51] He bids us beware, then, of the dangerous aphorisms of Christian resignation.

VII. We are now prepared to understand how the saving of one's soul may be an aesthetic matter. When morality no longer consists in obedience to a law, but in creating a law for oneself, suited to one's nature and genius, and realizing oneself in accordance with that law, as far as one's strength and the obstacles set up by society will allow, we will ask of a man not how many things he is ashamed of doing, not how many restraints he has practiced, but whether he has made his life an aesthetically satisfying thing. "Life is a series of movements which interweave lines. That forms a design. Is it harmonious? That is the whole question, all morality is contained in that."[52]

If our ethics is to be no more exigent than in this insistence upon harmony may we not rightly fear that it is only a philosophy of parasitism? In the fragmentary Pas sur le Sable left at his death, Gourmont gives even more explicit grounds for such an interpretation. "A solid and well-balanced intelligence in a healthy body will always be content with doing no more than is necessary to preserve its happy vegetative condition."[53]

A failure to recognize that the real problem is not just a har-

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[50] A Night in the Luxembourg, pp. 81–82.
[51] Promenades Philosophiques, III, pp. 201–202.
[52] *Op. cit.*, p. 251.
[53] Translated by Pound, in Dial 69:370.

monizing of the impulses of the individual, but the harmonizing of wills seems to be one of Gourmont's weak points. For if a sound psychopathology can point to innumerable psychoses resulting from antagonistic cravings struggling to issue into action through the final common motor path, sociology can likewise contribute its observation that if we take no thought to harmonize conflicting individual wills, the result may well be social disaster. This task is made ever more difficult, by the growing complexity and interdependence of society, but also ever more imperative. Gourmont's answer to such criticisms would be, as we have seen, that the individual alone matters, that in our anxiety to save the house, we are witnessing the destruction of the people who live in it; that you cannot expect to make a happy humanity by rendering all individual men unhappy. And yet, surely, even if there exist nothing but individuals, there are different individuals, all of whom want to be happy, but all of whom cannot be without some social control. While not wishing to over-emphasize our disagreement with our author, may we not suggest the possibility of a regulation which will secure these ends by making group activity pleasant, without requiring too great a sacrifice of self-directive activity. The words with which Professor Woodworth closes his Dynamic Psychology give succinct statement to this point of view.

"The formula for social betterment, while it should not omit such contributions to purely individual values as organization can compass, and while it should certainly not set up the fiction of society as an entity superior to the individuals composing it, would emphasize especially the improvement of the conditions of group activity, with a view to making it more worthy of the efforts of the individual, and more interesting and satisfying to him."[54]

VIII. To the retrospective glance, it is perhaps clearer than ever that if we would understand Gourmont the man, his passionate desire for freedom is no less important than his lucid critical intelligence, and closely allied to it. From scores of expressions of this desire take just one: "I demand the freedom of the

[54] Woodworth, Dynamic Psychology, p. 206.

theatre, and that of writing, and freedom in morals, freedom of religions and philosophies and in short all the liberties, except that of injuring my neighbor in action or insult, by the fist or by the word."[55] He is serene, well-poised, ironical, aristocratic, an impartial observer. Almost his only boasts are of his freedom and sincerity. As a critic, "never have the race, nor the religion, nor the opinions of a writer prevented my judging him with an absolute independence."[56] He refused to be tagged and classified; he is Remy de Gourmont, individual, thinker-for-himself, and practising philosopher. Beyond that one cannot go far without infringing upon his freedom or bounding him on this side or that where he will not be bound. Even the appellation—which one would suppose agreeable to him—of freethinker, is rejected because of its narrow associations. "How I regret not being able to become a free-thinker! But I cannot. For me, that would be a step backwards. I desire to maintain my place beyond the true and false, in the region from which one can observe the acts of men, not without feeling, which would be very tedious, but without prejudice—and even this is not without its disadvantages."[57] A certainty of a negation is still too certain for such a sceptic. Living in scepticism, Gourmont is able to say: "Doubtless religion is not true, but anti-religion is no truer; the truth lies in a state of perfect indifference."[58] If this seem paradoxical, remember that he asserts that to maintain a paradox has always seemed to him the most despicable of employments.[59] We see our author then as one whose love of freedom is so great that it makes him afraid or unable to think some things through to their solution, makes him dismiss our anxiety for the solution as a superstition, natural to us on our lower plane. For his state is not to be expected of everyone; "very simple ideas lie within the reach of very complicated minds only."[60] Those who do not

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[55] Epilogues, II, p. 318.
[56] Epilogues, I, p. 212.
[57] Epilogues, III, p. 230.
[58] Promenades Philosophiques, III, p. 252.
[59] Promenades Philosophiques, II, p. 8.
[60] Decadence, p. 19.

understand,—and this is what he means by the people[61] —must perforce live differently. Man, in general at least, "is born on his knees and must adore."[62] If most of the race of men is the dupe of what to Gourmont is our extraordinary moral organization, "most of them are very well satisfied with their slavery, so much so that their goodness suffers at the sight of those who have won their freedom."[63]

If freedom is the core of his, and of every thinker's attitude toward life, it is the lack of freedom in thought that perhaps explains the relative unimportance, socially and historically, of the people, in spite of their numbers. Even the changes which are regarded as most definitely movements of the people, revolutions, always come from above.[64]

The calm of even such an observer has its human limits, and the war upset Gourmont frightfully. Still, he was one of the first to recover his balance in so far as that was possible with the knowledge then available, and those little volumes in which his contributions to the *Mercure de France* and *La France* during 1915 are collected show more of tolerance and intelligence and less of unreasoning hate than many people have yet reached. He is, for instance, not willing to believe a thing merely because it is convenient when it is scarcely exact.[65] He laments the fact that "irony has disappeared from written literature, and irony is the sign of intellectual serenity."[66] Neither his irony nor his serenity often forsook him.

A scepticism so deep rooted as his became the basis of that rarest form of irony which forbids taking anything too seriously, even oneself. The divinity into whose mouth he puts the Epicureanism of Une Nuit au Luxembourg concludes, "I could have told you the exact opposite, and that also would have been the truth."[67] His poems he calls Divertissements. When will the man be serious? He makes one of the interlocutors

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[61] Promenades Philosophiques, III, p. 272.
[62] Les Chevaux de Diomède, p. 191.
[63] Lettres d'un Satyre, p. 10.
[64] Promenades Philosophiques, III, p. 273.
[65] Dans la Tourmente, p. 41.
[66] *Op. cit.*, p. 50.
[67] A Night in the Luxembourg, p. 85.

in his Dialogues des Amateurs say: "I love these great questions: God, morality, progress; they are inexhaustible sources of gaiety."[68]

If you object to the immoral consequences of his theories, he will reply that thought is only a game[69], which if well played may serve as well as any other to kill time, and that for all we know, that may be the end of human activity.[70] Or, more seriously, he may protest that he himself does not intend to follow his theories to the end, at least to-day. It would lead him too far.[71] Besides, "the true philosopher does not desire to see his ideas applied. He knows that they would be badly applied, deformed, rendered mediocre.[72] To free thought from the fear of the base transformations it thus suffers, we must separate the two domains, leave action to the guidance of instinct, and so allow thought to expand untrammeled in all the tremendous beauty of its absolute nature. "Thought ought not to be acted, the act not to be thought."[73] This much of truth we see in his paradox, that it is only the crisis caused by the failure or inadequacy to the situation of instinct or habit that calls for conscious thought. But we suspect that some day such a dichotomy as Gourmont here makes between thought and action may seem as outworn as the dualism of body and soul. Any thought, unless it be the merest inconsequential embroidery, must be directly related to action.

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[68] Epilogues, IV., p. 46.
[69] A Night in the Luxembourg, p. 60.
[70] Promenades Philosophiques, p. 178.
[71] Les Chevaux de Diomède, p. 62.
[72] Promenades Philosophiques, III, p. 270.
[73] Les Chevaux de Diomède, p. 245.

## IV

### A Note on Gourmont and Nietzsche

The mind avid of similarities is sure to ask somewhat of the relation between the philosophy we have reviewed and the thought of Nietzsche. One is tempted to say, simply and inaccurately, that Gourmont is the French interpreter of Nietzsche. Then one reflects that any disciple refracts a little the teachings of a master; certainly Gourmont would. Anyone so erudite as he has more than one master, and he has expressed his admiration not only for Epicurus and Lucretius, with their modern disciples, but for the ascetic Spinoza, the simple humanity of the eighteenth century French philosophy, and with less abandon, for Hobbes and Bacon. His mind is bound to be more and other than a mirror of Nietzsche's, to reflect learning and sympathies so catholic.

Francis de Miomandre speaks of him as "quite like Nietzsche, whom for that matter, he discovered only when already in full possession of his thought, and in whom then he found, not, as has been said, a revelation, but a brilliant and lyrical confirmation of his own ideas."[1]

Moreover, he has given us his own warning: "Nietzsche eclipses us all; we have all attempted to think in his fashion, ingeniously, paradoxically . . . But do not endeavor to find in Nietzsche all that is Nietzschean in our literature of the last decade, for his greatness was precisely that his thought was thought by others beside him."[2]

Certainly, however, the fact that no name occurs so often on Gourmont's pages as that of Nietzsche, whom he admired as the supreme exemplar of the thinker's virtue, freedom, indicates an influence on the one hand and an intimacy of knowledge on the other which at least help to explain the world view of the French thinker.

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[1] Grande Revue, 23:1, p. 148.
[2] Promenades Philosophiques, I., p. 143.

Although he at one time wrote that sound thinking cannot be done in maladjusted bodies, at another we find him saying: "Perhaps it would be wise not to confuse . . . physiology and literary criticism."[3] Certainly in the case of Nietzsche he denies any connection between health or sickness and the quality of the literary and philosophic production. This may be because Nietzsche was extraordinarily clear sighted at the time he was doing most of his work. At any rate, "Madness is no argument against the fact, against the work."[4] A philosophy must be judged on its merits. "Nietzsche died insane and his work is none the less one of the great works of our time."[5]

His approval of Nietzsche finds expression in such appreciations as follow. Nietzsche, the revealer, stupifies him. "He seldom expresses any but truths which commend themselves to our intelligence."[6] "Nietzsche opened the door. One can now enter freely the orchard, where, before him, it was necessary to scale the walls."[7] "Nietzsche's is the thought of the mountain-top. The horizon is tempestuous, stormy. . . . His philosophy truly has respiratory virtues. It has the purity of the air of the peaks; it increases our vital force. Nietzsche thought on the mountain top."[8] The struggle of Nietzsche with the reactionary forces of the morality he attacked, left him bruised and bloody. "He began to curse and to sing to cheat his terror."[9]

He believes, "with Nietzsche, that stupidity is a condition of life, that it is the very foundation of human societies, but perhaps it might be reduced. Too much is too much."[10]

The actual Nietzschean elements in Gourmont's philosophy, particularly his ethics, are many. If we can never be sure just how much Gourmont owes to Nietzsche at least we are struck with the numerous points of agreement. Without Nietzsche

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[3] Decadence, p. 58.
[4] *Op. cit.*, p. 83.
[5] *Loc. cit.*
[6] *Loc. cit.*
[7] *Op. cit.*, p. 99.
[8] *Op. cit.*, p. 28.
[9] Promenades Philosophiques, I, p. 143.
[10] Decadence, p. 85.

should we have had from our author that world view, the essence of which is a background of despair, and the resolve, taking life of these terms, to make of it something glorious by gaining power over it? Neither would advise us to dominate life in the ascetic or Schopenhauerian way, by shunning it. However few be its pleasures, life is to be accepted; mysticism is cowardly and inadequate; we are made for life and our adjustment to life must be made on that basis.

For one the zest is in a noble struggle, for the other in the fruits of victory. From the warrior fighting for a distant and scarce-glimpsed goal with, for the sake of the fight and the goal, an asceticism hardly less than that he struggles against, Gourmont brings us back to the sage, who has won the fight, merely by having confidence in himself. Neither the bloody struggle nor the breath of the mountain top are his; some exhilaration has been lost, some comfort gained; he has entered upon his heritage and his only care is to enjoy it to the full.

## V

### Retrospect

While it may very well be that age brings weakness rather than wisdom and that the progress of the years entails only cowardly regress in boldness of thought, it is at all events an interesting commentary on a man's philosophy of life to set down his own last opinions of it. Marcel Coulon has thus stated what seem to him the changes the mellowness of years made in Gourmont: "Beginning by expressing an absolute individualism and having long expressed it, Gourmont, without retracting, and remaining an individualist by feeling, arrived at conceptions on art, religion, politics, man, society as they are to-day which are less unfavorable to order, discipline, solidarity. The transcendental idealist became a determinist in metaphysics, the radical theorist who judged individual and social facts, acquired, if not in his sentiments, at least in his way of judging, a practical opportunism. The fierce advocate of liberty became tolerant and benevolent."[1] Something more of pity, of indulgence tempered by despisal can be made out in his work. As he becomes convinced of the hopelessness of making men and society more as he would have them, "there came to him a still calmer indifferene, a larger tolerance, in short, while always tinged with aristocratic disdain, a more philosophic serenity."[2]

In his Lettres à l'Amazone (1912) we find a Gourmont speaking in the past tense, as of a dying self,—not yet dead nor separated from the present by a great gulf (for it was in this vein that he wrote after the outbreak of the war.) It is here that we must seek the answer to our question, how satisfactory in the living has Epicureanism proved? Dust and ashes, or . . . ?

In general, one may say that in essentials he is consistent. Such a statement as the following may be Epicureanism of an im-

[1] Coulon, M., Preface to Pages Choisies, p. 9.
[2] Miomandre, in Grande Revue, 23:1, p. 149.

possible refinement, but it is still Epicureanism. "But it is especially the satisfaction of a Nietzschean renunciation into which I sometimes fall. On the days when one casts aside egoism, one feels as it were an anticipatory liberation from life. That is very restful. I find holidays propitious for it. To live only just enough to taste the joys of nothingness, barely to taste them, like distant music, like the last noise of night as it falls asleep. . . . One must sometimes abandon life."[3] Strange language this, of abandoning life, in one who has told us so often that the whole business of living creatures is to live intensely, joyously, but after all it is comprehensible, so long as such abandonment be not forever.

He has learned to pursue pleasure in a less headlong fashion, valuing it because it is freely chosen, more than for its own sake.[4] But if some pleasure can be too brutal, too instinctive for him, one must not conclude that the well-worn phrase "to conquer one's passions" conveys his aim. "And why," he asks, "should one? I can understand that one might wish to order them, render them flexible, master them, but that it be to render them more docile, in order to enjoy them more easily and more fruitfully."[5]

More complete disillusionment sometimes brings a note as of Koheleth, but not afraid of inconsistency, Gourmont rouses himself to thrust off the mood. "I used not to be able to resist a desire, but I have seen that desires accomplished and desires deferred died the same death, the former of shock, the latter of atrophy, which is sweeter, but which also is death. Then I lost interest in both. I became reasonable. But I am uttering blasphemies which are also lies. My state of mind is such only at moments. And when I am sane, I say on the contrary: One must be even to the end like a blind, inexperienced animal before life. As long as we are living, we must live, and there is no life except in the tendency of the being to all the realizations that are in its power and even to those that exceed it. Experience is a great school of cowardice; it is vile to yield to it. . . .

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[3] Lettres à l'Amazone, pp. 26–27.
[4] *Op. cit.*, p. 162.
[5] *Op. cit.*, p. 165.

"I have only too many tendencies to renunciation through pride, and if it is a little late to modify my nature, it is always time to get acquainted with it and to admit it. But I shall admit also that I have oftener struggled against my tendencies than yielded to them. You see what contradictions that must have engendered. As for me, I do not feel them; philosophically, I consider contradiction as necessary to intellectual and passional equilibrium. Without it, one would fall into mania and from mania into conviction, which is the last degree of stupidity."[6]

In moments when his thinking seems to himself clearest Gourmont is to the last true to his life-long philosophy of life. "It is noble to invoke happiness, even when one knows it is not listening, and that shall be my last strophe. A little lyricism is amusing."[7] Whether he has not unconsciously substituted a vague nobility for happiness as his aim here, is a question; it is my opinion that we should allow him the lyricism without quibbling over the word.

In spite of a not unnatural melancholy[8] and a mediocre success in the attainment of his and all men's principal object in this world, he is in essentials the Gourmont of the ironic epilogues, the sophisticated novels. "I have never," he says[9] "aimed at anything but pleasure and I have scarcely succeeded in attaining it. Doubt has pursued me even within my self."

He even refuses the lesson of moderation which experience is said to teach. "Moderate sensations, moderate sentiments, moderate desires, or all the excesses of life put off till later, when we shall no longer be, that is wisdom. I should rather be crucified like a Roman slave, to enjoy at least a pain without moderation."[10]

If there be another conclusion usually thought of as equally inevitable in the sage it is the primacy of the things of the mind, the ephemeral character of the body and all things bodily. Yet

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[6] *Op. cit.*, pp. 222–223.
[7] *Op. cit.*, p. 230.
[8] *Op. cit.*, p. 253.
[9] *Op. cit.*, p. 277.
[10] *Op. cit.*, p. 244.

Gourmont has not learned to minimize the pleasures of the body; neither has the physical lost for him its old basic importance. "Life is first of all physical; it rests upon physical powers, it develops by physical means, it is conquered by physical arms and yields its secret only under physical pressure. . . . All metaphysics must be physics first if it is to be more than idle dreaming."[11]

That, for the problems that have concerned us, we may take as his last word.

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[11] *Op. cit.*, p. 281.

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